

United States Senate

374

June 13, 2019

The Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street Southwest
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Pai,

I write to urge the Federal Communications Commission (FCC or The Commission) to prioritize accredited educational institutions and Tribal Nations who apply for Educational Broadband Service (EBS) licenses for the unlicensed 2.5 GHz band. As you know, EBS is a service reserved for educational institutions, to provide broadband internet access to students, faculty, and community members. This is one of the few tools the Commission has to close the homework gap. The FCC recently announced that licenses would be made available for use of the 2.5 GHz band of the radio spectrum, and it is critical that this band is first made available for EBS use. EBS spectrum has provided crucial affordable access to broadband in areas that commercial entities have not.

The Commission suspended the processing of EBS applications in 1993, leaving many licenses available but inaccessible for educational institutions. In Michigan alone, there are 129 unassigned licenses covering 426 K-12 schools and 21 post-secondary institutions. EBS is the backbone for 4G and future 5G deployment that will benefit all Americans. I commend the FCC for proposing to resume and complete licensing EBS spectrum, particularly in rural and underserved areas with limited or no broadband options. However, I am concerned that some licensing plans the FCC is considering would effectively remove educational entities and Indian Tribal Nations from the EBS band at a time when broadband for education is more important than ever. It is critical that the FCC prioritize accredited educational institutions and Tribal Nations as the Commission resumes the licensing process.

Across Michigan, EBS has been successfully used to provide connectivity to communities who otherwise would not have broadband access. Northern Michigan University (NMU) was able to deploy an advanced LTE network in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. NMU maintains its network to commercial standards, adopting the latest LTE technologies. NMU has even deployed its first 5G test site in the Menominee, Michigan area. Today, NMU serves over 11,000 students and families in over 51 Upper Peninsula communities, and is on track to expand its service to 114 unserved or underserved communities by 2020. In the Lower Peninsula, Barger Creek Wireless has partnered with Alpena Community College (ACC) to work to bridge the homework gap and the digital divide for Alpena students and surrounding primary schools. Access to currently unavailable EBS spectrum would allow Barger Creek and companies similarly situated to increase the quality, availability and speed of their wireless broadband service and expand access to

underserved communities. NMU, ACC and the many other EBS success stories can only be replicated and expanded by maintaining current educational eligibility requirements.

EBS is not only helpful to rural communities. Roughly 23 percent of people in urban areas do not have access to broadband. In Detroit, Wayne State University has utilized EBS to expand internet access. Wayne State was able to lease their spectrum, leading to the construction of necessary infrastructure to make the 4G LTE network operational. The cellular 4G LTE network now covers 38,000 square miles and four million people, helping these Detroiters fully participate in our state's economy and society. An estimated 70 percent of teachers assign homework that requires access to broadband, even as 12 million American students go home at the end of each school day to a household that lacks a high-speed internet connection. EBS continues to provide students in Detroit an opportunity to compete with the rest of the country.

Today, the Commission has the opportunity to get this proceeding right for unserved and underserved communities and expand upon successful deployments of EBS, like in Michigan. I urge you to fulfill your obligation to underserved communities and prioritize accredited educational institutions and Tribal Nations when licensing the remaining EBS spectrum. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator